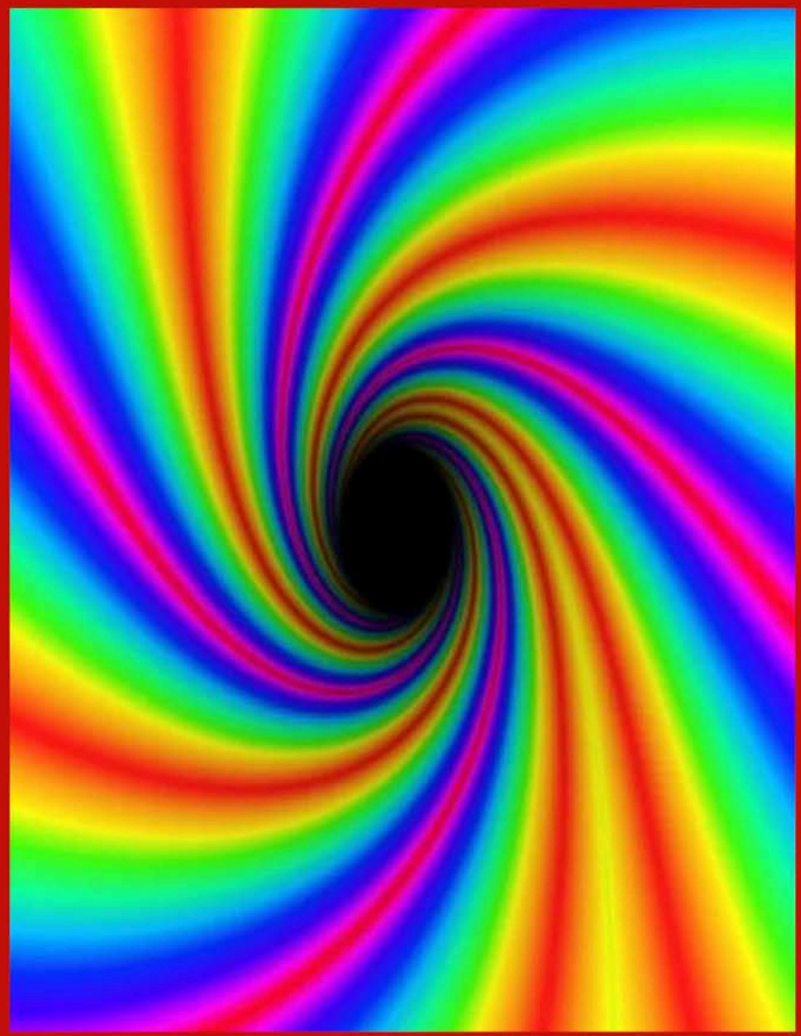
Dr Amit Sur and his wife Dr. Shyamali Sengupta Sur were born in Kolkata, India, where they received their Masters degrees in Physics. They received their PhDs at the University of Pittsburgh. They reside in New York City.



# The Story of The Rainbow Bunch

DR AMIT SUR

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Dr Amit Sur

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# DEDICATED TO

*My parents Late Mr Mihir Kumar Sur and Late Mrs Kalyani Sur*

*and, to my in-laws*

*Late Mr Satyen Sengupta and Late Dr Ganga Sengupta*

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my wife, Shyamali, my children, Malini and Indraneel, and, my grand-daughters Geetanjali and Pushpanjali, for their love and support.

I would also like to thank my old friend Prof Surjit Singh for editing and publishing the book.

Dr Amit Sur
Flushing, NY
June 2022

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# PREFACE

Dr Debu Majumdar, a close friend, called me many years ago and said "You are missing something in your life, you should join an Unitarian congregation near you." I looked up in the phone directory and my wife and I went to visit the Hollis Unitarian Church near my home. One of the members welcomed us to the church and soon we joined the church.

We continued our participation in Hindu religious events and we also participate in Christian religious events at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock in Manhasset, Long Island.

This pamphlet is a small effort to explain their mission.

# CHAPTER 1. A FAMILY BECOMES THE RAINBOW BUNCH

This is a story of a rather unusual family. Mr. Balbir Singh who was born in India and Mrs. Brianna O'Connell who was born in Ireland met in New York City and got married. They did not have any children of their own so are raising seven adopted children in Port Washington, a beautiful town in Long Island, NY. The town has beautiful parks with full view of the Long Island Sound, and offers a diverse range of culinary choices. Another attraction is an easy access to the Long Island Rail Road Station and a short ride to Manhattan.

These children were adopted from seven racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds – Violet, Indigo, Blue, Green, Yellow, Orange, and Red. Three girls and four boys.

Violet's biological parents are Hindus from West Indies. Violet is a vibrant 14 year old girl who is determined to focus on her studies while helping her parents and younger siblings as much as she can. She is in 8th grade, and wants to be a Pediatrician when she grows up so she can get sick children feel better.

Indigo's biological parents are Jewish, and are from New York. Indigo is 13 year old. She is a 7th grader in the same school as Violet. She loves to play the piano, and wants to be a concert pianist one day.

Blue is a 12 year old boy whose biological parents are Buddhists and live in Thailand. He is a 6th grader, loves mathematics and is a top notch soccer player in school. He wants to be an expert in Computer Science when he grows up.

Green is 11 year old and attends the 5th grade. Her biological parents are from India and follow the Jain religion. She has

excellent writing skills, and wants to be a journalist covering the plight of the endangered species around the globe.

Yellow's biological parents are from Brazil and are Christians. He is 10 year old, and is in the 4th grade. He is especially interested in Science, and wants to be an astronaut when he grows up.

Orange is 9 years old and attends the 3rd grade. His biological parents follow Islam and live in Egypt. He is especially fond of his dad, so he wants to get a job and be a dad himself.

Red's biological parents are Sikhs and live in Australia. He is an 8 year old 2nd grader who has exceptional skills in drawing and wants to be an artist when he grows up.

# CHAPTER 2. A FAMILY IN SEARCH OF A SUITABLE HOUSE OF WORSHIP

The parents search for a house of worship for all the kids so each of them will gain a deep knowledge of their own religion at birth and an appreciation of the other six religions.

First they go to a Catholic Church in town. They speak with a Minister who welcomes the family. Balbir asked him "I know you will provide them with an excellent training in Roman Catholic religion, but can you also teach them about other religions?" The Father said, "Sorry, we focus only on one religion and we are not able to teach any other religions." They receive the same answers when they go to a Sikh Gurdawara; a Hindu Temple; a Synagogue; a Buddhist Temple; Jain Temple; and a Mosque.

Finally they come to the Unitarian Congregation of New Hyde Park. The minister of Religious Education, Joan Cunningham, not only affirmed that they will teach the children about all the major religions in the world, but was delighted that thy have such a diverse background and such open minds.

## CHAPTER 3. JOAN GAVE THE FAMILY AN OVERVIEW OF UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM

"It is a liberal and open minded religion, where members study and develop their own theology with a foundation of Jewish and Christian traditions and thinking, but open to other religions and the messages of other spiritual leaders. The members believe the following seven core principles

1. Each and every person is important.
2. All people should be treated fairly and kindly.
3. We should accept one another and keep on learning together.
4. Each person must be free to search for what is true and right in life.
5. All persons should have a vote about the things that concern them.
6. We should work for a peaceful, fair, and free world.
7. We should work for our planet Earth, the home we share with all living things."

"Who are the famous Unitarian Universalists that shaped this religion", asked Blue.

"Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, John Adams, and Benjamin Franklin are a few of the many remarkable Unitarian Universalists," answered Joan.

Balbir and Brianna discussed their becoming members of this congregation with the kids, and they liked the idea very much. So instead of seven of them going to seven schools, the children started to attend Religious Education classes at this congregation.

The children are taught the basics of all the major religions around the world, and also the teachings of the Unitarian Universalist thought leaders. They are also encouraged to visit

other houses of worship close by, so they get to know the different religions better.

After several years went by with the children making friends with a diverse group of other children. One day they all got together and decided to spend a whole morning discussing the essence of each of their religions.

# CHAPTER 4. VIOLET COVERED THE ESSENCE OF HINDUISM (DIWALI)

"Hinduism is one of the oldest religion in the world. It started in India some 5,000 years ago. The three main gods are Brahma, the creator; Vishnu, the preserver; and Shiva, the destroyer.

Shiva's wife is Parvati, and their children are Ganesha, who removes obstacles in life; Kartikeya is the god of war; Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth; and Saraswati, the goddess of learning and music. Ganesha has the head of an elephant is a very popular god."

"How did Ganesha get an elephant head?" asked Red.

"Well this is what happened", said Violet. "He was a regular child at first, but may be a little naughty. So his dad said "Off with your head". Luckily his mom was close by. She pleaded Shiva give her son back to her. "OK", said Shiva. "I will get him the head of the first one that comes by". The first one was, however not a person, but an elephant. So Shiva through his powers revived Ganesha and attached the head of the elephant. "Wow! That's quite an interesting story", said Red.

"Vishnu is a special god, as he transforms into a human form and comes to the earth to get rid of a tyrant so peace can prevail again."

"Hindus believe that there is only one god, but having different gods and goddesses give them a choice", explained Violet. "Hindus believe that the God or the Universal Soul is within every human being in the form of an individual soul. When two Hindus meet they greet each other saying 'Namaste' which means the divinity in me is bowing down to the divinity in you. They also believe that the soul never dies, but comes back to the earth in another form human or animal, based on the good or bad deeds they left behind in their last life. While there are many holy books, the most popular holy book is Gita which describes

the different paths that lead to spiritual knowledge.

"Do Hindus have a fixed day of the week, like Saturday for me, and Sunday for Yellow?" asked Indigo.,

"No, that is not the case for us". Most Hindus have a small corner of their home dedicated for "puja" or prayers to their chosen god or goddess. There are many festivals throughout the year when they go to the nearby Mandir, for prayers, and communal gatherings. One special such event is Diwali. It is a major holiday in India. After sunset, every one lights a small lamp in front of Lakshmi, and other prominent parts of their homes which glows in darkness. Fireworks are also common. The light is supposed to remove the ignorance, and bring good luck to everyone.

Her mother asked, "Which Hindu leader do you admire most?"

Violet replied, "Mahatma Gandhi, who was able to win freedom for all Indians not by fighting the British rulers, but by non-violent resistance."

"Let us end today's discussion with a traditional Hindu prayer."

"May God bring peace everywhere in the world", concluded Violet.

# CHAPTER 5. INDIGO COVERED THE ESSENCE OF JUDAISM

"Judaism started in the Middle East about 3,500 years ago. Abraham is the father of the Jewish people, and Moses is the prophet who freed the Jews from slavery in Egypt. Jews believe that there is only one God. It is believed that God gave Moses the 10 Commandments, which instruct the Jewish people to lead an ethical life. He also gave him the Torah, the holy book which is read during prayers. When boys and girls come of age, they have to lead other members by reading important passages from the Torah. The essence of Judaism is not to spend all your time in religious studies and arguments, but be kind to everyone."

"Many Jews observe a holy period from sun down on Friday to sun down on Saturday when they pray to God, and not perform business and other activities. Some Jewish groups do not ride a car or watch television. Instead they walk to the closest Synagogue to pray and meet with their friends and families. The entire neighborhood is quiet and peaceful during this time. Many Jews maintain a strict diet based on religious guidelines. Israel, and Jerusalem are popular destinations for Jewish people."

"What are some of the festivals and which one do you like most?" asked Yellow.

"I am glad you asked this question", replied Indigo. "We have festivals throughout the year, usually celebrating a victory in a war, or God's kind actions. The start of a new year coincides with Rosh Hashanah, a celebration of God's creation of the world. This festival is followed by Yom Kippur when we seek forgiveness from others. Many Jews fast for the whole day, and spend time at the Synagogue to pray. During Passover, we recall the exodus from Egypt with Moses leading the Jews out of

slavery. Families sit down and follow a traditional meal while remembering the plight of the Jews in Egypt, but also celebrate their hard fought freedom."

My favorite festival is Hanukkah, when we light a special lamp called a menorah, which holds eight candles. God allowed a lamp with enough oil to burn for one day last for eight days. Gifts are exchanged during this time. I also like Purim, a colorful festival celebrating the defeat of Haman, an evil person."

"Who do you admire among famous Jews in modern time?" asked her father. "I like Gustav Mahler, the composer, and Albert Einstein, the famous physicist," replied Indigo.

Indigo concluded with a prayer: "May it be your will, the Eternal One, our God, God of our ancestors, that wars and bloodshed be abolished from the world, and bring into the world a great and wonderful and lasting peace. And let no nation lift a sword against a nation—let them learn no more the ways of war!"

Other family members repeated this prayer, and they all became peaceful.

# CHAPTER 6. BLUE COVERS THE ESSENCE OF BUDDHISM (BUDDHA'S BIRTHDAY)

Blue led this discussion on Buddhism.

The Buddha was born 2500 years ago in Kapilavasthu at the foothills of the Himalayan mountains. His name at birth was Siddhartha Guatama. His father was the King of the local town. A sage advised the King that either his may leave the palace and go to the forest to become a monk and a spiritual leader. His father created an artificial environment for his son so he is not exposed to any bad experiences like sickness and death among the people around him. Siddhartha spent his childhood without ever venturing outside the palace, but when he was 16 he wondered what was beyond the four walls of his palace, and he started to go outside the palace, with his friend Chanda.

The first day he saw a sick man lying by the side of the road. He asked Chanda why this man was in such a state. His companion explained that all human beings will suffer sickness sometime in his or her life. The second day he saw a man who was very old, and his body was weak. "Am I going to get old like this man one day?" he asked Chanda. "Yes, Siddhartha, that is true". The third day he saw a body being carried by other men to the local river. They all looked very sad and were chanting the name of a Hindu god as they went on their way. "What has happened with this man?" asked Siddhartha, and Chanda said that the man has died, and they are taking his body to a special place next to the river for cremation. "Will I die one day also?" asked Siddhartha. "Yes, my friend" said Chanda. On his next outing, he saw a monk who was at peace with himself.

He was a different person after these four sightings. The King arranged for his marriage. After a year went by, the couple was blessed with a son. But Siddhartha was not happy at all. One day he left his palace, and went to the forest to find out why humans

suffer and what can relieve their pain.

After several years of meditation all alone in the deep forest, he finally realized the source of human sufferings: their attachments and cravings. He also had a prescription to remove these sufferings. He became "The Buddha" or the enlightened one, and started giving lectures to his close friends. He taught his followers to be kind to other humans and animals. He asked them to lead a simple life, not get attached to their possessions. He encouraged them to meditate. This is his message, also called the Dharma.

Two famous Buddhist spiritual leaders today are Dalai Lama who lives in India, and Thich Naht Hahn who lives in France.

"What is your favorite Buddhist festival?" asked Yellow. "Buddha's birthday celebrated in the month of May. Many Buddhists light a candle as a symbol of his teachings lighting up the world", replied Blue.

"Besides Buddha, Buddhists talk about "Dharma" which means cosmic law and order, and also "Sangha" which is the community of ordained Buddhist monks or nuns. Let us end today's discussion saying a prayer together which I will lead, and you repeat after me", said Blue.

"Let us take refuge in the Buddha. Let us take refuge in the Dharma. Let us take refuge in the Sangha", said Blue. Then all family members repeated: "Let us take refuge in the Buddha. Let us take refuge in the Dharma. Let us take refuge in the Sangha."

All the family members were at peace after this discourse led by Blue.

# CHAPTER 7. GREEN COVERED THE ESSENCE OF JAINISM

"Jainism is another old religion with its roots in India. Jains do not pray to a God. They follow the teachings of former spiritual leaders. The last such leader was Mahavira, who lived around the same time as Buddha. His statues are found in Jain Temples. They also believe that humans must live a moral life to attain 'Moksha' when they will no longer be required to be born again. The key concept in Jainism is non-violence, not only towards all humans, but all animals and plants. Other key beliefs are to always tell the truth, and never steal any object from any other person. Most Jains are vegetarian. Many Jains are so afraid that they will accidentally kill or harm an animal or an insect, they refrain from working in the farms. They work in other fields including Medicine, Law, Banking, etc.", explained Green.

"Have you ever visited a Jain Temple?" asked Blue.

"Yes, I visited a temple in Queens with dad", said Green. "It was very peaceful. Devotees were chanting hymns, and Indian music was playing in the background. What impressed me most was a sign where food was offered to the visitors. It read 'Take only the amount that you will eat, please do not throw away even a small amount of rice'."

"The three guiding principles of Jainism are right belief, right knowledge and right conduct", noted Green.

"What Jain festival do you like most?" asked Indigo.

"I like the celebration of Mahavira's birthday. This special day is celebrated by going to a Jain Temple, singing prayers, pulling a chariot with an idol of Mahavira, offer him food, enjoying the company of our friends, and finally every one sitting done for a vegetarian lunch. My most favorite food are the colorful sweets,

first offered to Mahavira, and then offered to all the devotees."

"Let us pray together", as Green led a popular Jain prayer:
"*May the entire universe be blessed.*
May every one engage in each other's well being.
May all weakness, sickness, and faults diminish.
May every person around the world be healthy, peaceful, and blissful."
"That was truly peaceful", commented Orange.

# CHAPTER 8. YELLOW COVERED THE ESSENCE OF CHRISTIANITY (CHRISTMAS AND EASTER)

"Jesus Christ was born over 2000 years ago in Bethlehem a small town near Jerusalem. His parents, mother Mary, and father Joseph were simple Jewish people. At the time of his birth, according to Christian legends, a bright star shone near Bethlehem, and three wise men brought gifts for the child and his parents. He had an ordinary life at first. He became a carpenter like his father. But slowly he became interested in Judaism and spirituality. When he was thirty, he roamed around the country with a few of his followers. Jesus is believed to have supernatural powers. He cured many sick people, and performed miracles like feeding five thousand people with a handful of loaves and fishes. He started giving sermons encouraging people to love every one and be kind to all.

A few of the existing religious leaders were not happy with the growing popularity of Jesus. Soon one of his friends betrayed him, and the Romans, who ruled the country at that time, had him killed on a Friday. Now known as Good Friday. But Christians believe that he rose from the dead as they could not find his body after a few days. This event is called Resurrection. The day is celebrated as Easter.

Most Christians go to a Church for the Sunday morning services and prayers. The ministers may read from the Bible, the choir may lead singing a song which praises the Lord, or discuss stories taught by Jesus called parables. After wards the minister usually greets them as they come out of the worship hall."

"What are some Christian holidays"? asked Green.

"The most popular holiday is Christmas, the birthday of Jesus,

December 25. It is observed throughout the world. Christians attend services, sing Christmas Carols, join with their friends and family members, and exchange gifts. On this day, many Christians also feed the hungry and give gifts to the poor. Another key holiday is Easter which celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus. Many families first go to a Church for prayers, and then gather together for a meal," said Yellow.

"Who do you admire among Christians?" asked Indigo.

"I am fond of Pope Francis. He is spreading the word of love and friendship around the world. I was so impressed when in his recent tour of the United States, he stopped his vehicle to receive a gift from a child. I also admire the contributions made by the late Mother Teresa of Kolkata, India who dedicated her entire life to serving the needs of the poor people," commented Yellow.

"Let us pray together", said Yellow.

"*Our Father in heaven hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."*

Yellow set up a statue of Jesus on his desk to remind him every day Jesus's message of love and kindness.

# CHAPTER 9. ORANGE COVERED THE ESSENCE OF ISLAM

"Islam was founded by Prophet Muhammad who was born 570 CE in Mecca which is now in Saudi Arabia. Muhammad's father passed away shortly before he was born, and he also lost his mother when he was only 6 years old. His uncle raised him, and gave him a job. He later started working for a lady named Khadija who fell in love with him. They were married shortly afterwards. One day while he was in a cave on top of a mountain near his home in Mecca, he was visited by an angel, who informed him that Allah (God) has selected him to proclaim His name. He was reluctant at first, but the angel kept appearing before him. He also received God's message which was written down as the Koran. He started teaching that Allah is the only God, and people should refrain from worshiping other Gods, and idols. The residents of Mecca were not willing to change their practices, so Muhammad decided to move his family and disciples to Medina to avoid further conflicts. He was also a great military leader, and after several battles he eventually took control of Mecca. Most of the residents in both Medina and Mecca became his disciples. He passed away at age 62. The religion he started his Islam, and followers are called Muslims. Today Islam has spread all around the world.

The five pillars of Islam are

1. Acknowledging that Allah as the only God, and Muhammad as Allah's prophet;
2. Praying five times a day facing Mecca, Saudi Arabia;
3. Donating at least 2.5 per cent of one's income to charitable organizations every year;
4. Fasting from dawn to dusk during the month of

Ramadan, and

5. Making every effort to visit Mecca once in one's lifetime"

"What are some of the important Muslim festivals?" asked Indigo.

"Ramadan is a key Muslim festival. In 2016 it will be from June 6th to July 5th. Muslims will fast all day. They may not eat any food or drink water, unless they are sick. After sunset, they participate in a prayer and then they have a communal dinner. Some Muslims believe that one reason this custom was set up by God is so everyone, rich or poor experiences hunger and thirst. This will allow those who are not poor to have empathy and compassion for the poor and the hungry people.

Eid is the festival which starts the first day after Ramadan. Lasting three days, it is a time for family and friends to get together, for celebrating with good food and gifts for children, and giving to charity," replied Orange.

"Who are your role models among Muslims in modern times?" asked Violet.

"I admire Muhammad Ali, the great boxer, and Malala Yousafzai, the Nobel-laureate," replied Orange.

At the end of his discourse, Orange led his family with a prayer from the Koran.

"*In the name of Allah, the beneficent, the merciful.*

Praise be to the Lord of the Universe who has created us and made us into tribes and nations, that we may know each other, not that we may despise each other. If the enemy incline towards peace, you should also incline towards peace, and trust in God, for the Lord is the one that hears and knows all things. And the servants of God, Most Gracious are those who walk on the Earth in humility, and when we address them, we say PEACE."

—Based on the Koran, 49:13, 8:61

The family was filled with joy and peace.

# CHAPTER 10. RED COVERS THE ESSENCE OF SIKHISM

"Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, was born in 1469 CE into a Hindu family living in India. From his teen years, he showed a deep interest in both Hinduism as well as Islam. He had an open mind and refused to put on a sacred thread as was the custom. At 16 the family arranged for his marriage, and he later had two children. One morning as he was walking along a river close by, he got a message from God: "There is only One God. His presence is felt everywhere, and all the time".

His life was changed forever after this day, and he went around preaching about his new ideas. He believed that all human beings are equal in God's eyes. He had both Hindu and Muslim followers, and they were called Sikhs. He started a tradition of feeding all his followers after the prayer services. Whether they were rich or poor, they would all have the same food together. His disciples started to write down his messages. After his death in 1539 CE, a new Guru took over his responsibilities. Including Guru Nanak, Sikhs recognize 10 Gurus. The last Guru is Guru Govind Singh. The teachings of the Gurus are captured in a holy scripture called Guru Granth Sahib. Copies of this book are kept at a prominent place in Sikh houses of worship called Gurdawara, and it plays a sacred role in Sikhism.

Sikhs wanted to create a distinctive identity for all Sikh men. Some of these unique practices include not cutting their hair, covering their heads, carrying a comb, wearing a steel bracelet, carrying a small sword to defend themselves against enemy attacks.

Some of the popular festivals are Guru Nanak's birthday in

October/November, and Guru Govind Singh's birthday in December/January."

"Who do consider a role model", asked Brianna.

I like several Sikh leaders such as Mr. Manmohan Singh, Former Prime Minister of India, Mr. Khushwant Singh, a famous author and Mr. Milkha Singh, the sprinter.

Red recited his favorite prayer:

"*Why do you go to the forest in search of the Divine? God lives in all and abides with you, too.*

*As fragrance dwells in a flower, or reflections on a mirror, so the Divine dwells inside every one.*

*Seek therefore in your own heart.*"

Guru Tegh Bahadur, the 9th Sikh Guru.

"Thanks for leading this discussion", said Balbir Singh. "I am proud of you."

"Thanks, Dad", said Red.

# CHAPTER 11. UNITY AMONG DIVERSITY

At the end of their presentations, Balbir and Brianna discussed with the children that although they are of different religions, different races, and were born in different countries, there is a Unity amongst their Diversity.

One a sunny day after a rainstorm the parents took the children to a park, and showed them a beautiful rainbow in the sky and they could see the seven colors in the rainbow Violet, Indigo, Blue, Green, Yellow, Orange and Red.

Balbir also set up a scientific experiment which showed how a prism breaks up a ray of white light into these seven colors.

"Let us sing our favorite Unitarian Universalist Song", said Brianna and the whole family joined with her.

*"From all that dwell below the skies*
*Let songs of hope and faith arise;*
*Let peace, good will on earth be sung*
*Through every land, by every tongue".*

The children realized that though they had many differences, they all come from the same source.

The family starts celebrating all the major festivals, and lives happily ever after. The children grow up appreciating that we are all humans and we should have love for all, malice for none.

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Amit Sur and his wife Dr. Shyamali Sengupta Sur were born in Kolkata, India, where they received their Masters degrees in Physics. They received their PhDs at the University of Pittsburgh. They reside in New York City.

# OTHER BOOKS BY THE PUBLISHER

For more information please visit

http://hindi-movies-songs.com/joomla/index.php/published-books

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